

PNEUMONIA



We're all aware of the precautions to take for virus and flu season. However, an additional danger is that any of these other conditions can morph into pneumonia. Pneumonia claims the lives of about 50,000 Americans each year.

Pneumonia is an infection that inflames the air sacs on one or both lungs and may cause them to fill with fluid. It is caused by a variety of sources including bacteria, viruses, and fungi. Many of the germs that can cause pneumonia are airborne. While our bodies are generally efficient at blocking these germs, stress, lack of sleep, general depression, colds, or any weakness can allow them to sneak in. Pneumonia is the most serious for infants, people older than 65, and people with existing health challenges or weakened immune systems. It is particularly dangerous for people with heart failure or chronic lung problems.

Source: [Mayo Clinic](#)



Types of Pneumonia

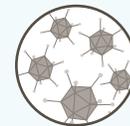
Bacterial pneumonia



The most common form of bacterial pneumonia is pneumococcal pneumonia. Often it occurs after one has had the cold or flu. It is contagious initially, but is no longer contagious after a couple of days of antibiotics.

Mycoplasma pneumoniae, or walking pneumonia, is a milder form of pneumonia. It is contagious and airborne. Those diagnosed often don't feel ill and are generally not hospitalized but can spread the pneumonia to others.

Viral pneumonia



Viruses, including COVID-19, can cause viral pneumonia. The flu is the most common viral gateway for pneumonia. Symptoms of viral pneumonia are initially similar to those of the flu but quickly affect the lungs and breathing.

Most viruses generally spark only a mild form of pneumonia in healthy individuals. However, COVID-19 has shown that, because of its inherent propensity for lung damage, it can introduce a more severe bout with pneumonia.

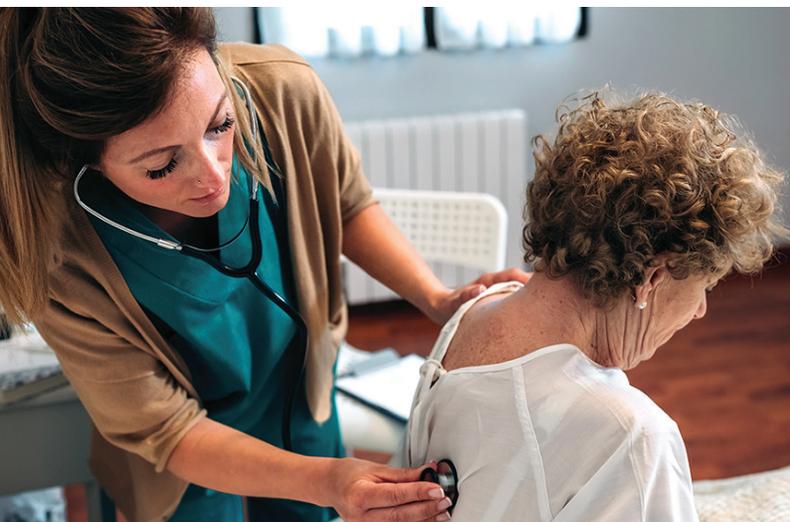
Older adults and people with serious illness or weak immune systems, ironically, may have fewer and milder symptoms, including a lower temperature rather than a fever. Mental acuity can be affected by a loss of oxygen to the brain, so any sudden change in mental awareness should be a cause for alarm.

Fungal pneumonia



Pneumonia caused by fungi is most common in people with compromised health. It is acquired through the soil or bird droppings. Ask your doctor if there are pneumonia-causing fungi in your area.

Source: [Mayo Clinic](#) and [American Lung Association](#)



Symptoms of Pneumonia

- Chest pain when breathing or coughing
- Confusion or changes in mental awareness (in adults age 65 and older)
- Cough, which may produce phlegm
- Fatigue
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- Fever over 102°, sweating and shaking chills
- Lower than normal body temperature (in adults older than age 65 and people with weak immune systems)
- Bluish lips and nailbeds
- Shortness of breath



Source: [Mayo Clinic](#)

Prevention

Get vaccinated – Talk with your doctor about which might be best for your loved one. Some of the vaccines that can help include:

- Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib)
- Influenza (flu)
- Measles
- Pertussis (whooping cough)
- Pneumococcal polysaccharide (recommended by the CDC for all adults over 65)
- Pneumococcal conjugate (recommended by the CDC for immune compromised individuals)
- Varicella (chickenpox)



Practice good hygiene – Make sure that your loved one is washing hands and sanitizing surfaces adequately, even in their own home.



Keep your immune system strong – Get enough sleep, move or exercise regularly, and eat a healthy diet.



Stay away from sick people – The distancing we've all been doing is helpful but if someone in the home is sick, isolate your immuno-compromised loved ones as well.



Don't smoke



Source: [Mayo Clinic](#) and [Center for Disease Control](#)

Risk Factors

Chronic Disease

Asthma, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), or heart disease are primary risks.

Smoking

On top of weakening the lungs, smoking generally weakens your body's natural defenses against bacteria and viruses that cause pneumonia.

Compromised Immune Systems

People who have HIV / AIDS, or who have had a transplant, chemotherapy, or steroids should be aware of the risks for pneumonia.

Being Hospitalized

ICU stays, especially on a ventilator, can be risky. That is not to say avoid going to the hospital if you need medical attention. Catching and treating illnesses early can help prevent a hospital stay.

Source: [Mayo Clinic](#)